

Oppression By Choice

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Property in money, means of subsistence, machines, and other means of production, does not as yet stamp a man as a capitalist if there be wanting the correlative -- the wage-worker, the other man who is compelled to sell himself of his own free-will.

(Marx, Capital, Vol. I, Ch.XXXIII)

I. The Problem

This paper presents a solution to two related puzzles concerning the nature of oppression: (1) can a social structure be oppressive if the situation that is alleged to be oppressive comes about as the result of the voluntary, informed, rational choice of the allegedly oppressed, and (2) why do oppressed people sometimes appear to join in their own oppression and reinforce it? Although there are several oppressed groups for whom these are interesting questions, I shall focus on the oppression of women, a group for whom these questions are often voiced in the form of accusations or justifications for unequal treatment.

On the face of it, the answer to question (1) seems to be no, since one of the criteria of oppression (so I shall argue) is that one suffer harms as a result of coercion. It may be asked, is it really oppression at all if the situation we call oppressive results from the voluntary, informed, rational choice of the purportedly oppressed? In his book, Feminism and Freedom, Michael Levin presents the skeptical position, claiming that any situation that results from choice or preferences vitiates the charge of oppression or discrimination.

Whether the assignment of sex roles is a device to keep women in thrall depends on how this assignment came about and how it is sustained. It is not an oppressive device if it came about because men and women for the most part innately prefer things the way they are, or as an unintended consequence of preferences. ... A charge of discrimination

is rebuttable by showing (for instance) that the numerical preponderance of men in positions of power came about through individual choices.¹

This claim coupled with the following charge from Victor Fuchs, a Stanford economist, would entail that women choose their economic oppression, and that nothing ought to be done to alter the situation.

¹. Michael Levin, Feminism and Freedom, (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), p.31.

On average women have a stronger demand for children than men do and have more concern for children after they are born. In short, there is a difference on the side of preferences, and this difference is a major source of women's economic disadvantage.²

There are two ways to read the argument that I am attributing to Levin. He might be claiming that if a feature of society is a consequence of the choices of most members of a group that are oppressed by it, then that feature is not oppressive. But this is just the mistake that one makes in stereotyping groups, and clearly an individual can be victimized by such stereotyping when it does not apply to her. More charitably, Levin could be read as charging that a person is not oppressed by a feature of society if it is the unintended result of her choices. I shall call this the view that *choice negates oppression*.³ Similar arguments are made often by libertarians and neo-classical economists to show that there is nothing oppressive about capitalism if property rights are properly enforced.⁴ For both Levin and libertarians, "unintended consequences of (individual) preferences" are unobjectionable. I shall argue, though, that oppression operates by means of apparently voluntary choices, and that the oppression of women in contemporary U.S. society is an example of choice under oppression. Because their choices are coerced, their choosing does not justify the conditions that result from their choices.

The conclusion I shall argue for is not controversial to some social theorists. Marxists argue for a similar conclusion, namely, that the working class is exploited or oppressed through its limited choices. Traditional Marxist theory holds that the members of the working class make these choices because they are under the sway of false consciousness; they have been fooled into thinking that the relative wealth and status in society is just or inevitable. Likewise a central claim of the second wave of the women's movement in the U.S. has been that women are shaped by society to see their situation as natural, inevi-

². Victor R. Fuchs, "Women's Quest for Economic Equality", Journal of Economic Perspectives, 3, no.1, (1989), p.38.

³. I thank Tamara Horowitz for pointing out this potential ambiguity in Levin's argument.

⁴. See Robert Nozick, Anarchy, State, and Utopia (New York: Basic Books, 1974), for example.

table, and sometimes even preferable. This argument would bring about the same conclusion that I wish to draw, that the conditions of women are unjustifiable, but it does so at an unacceptably high price. The problem with the argument is that it is only a part of the story, and telling only that part encourages a rather disrespectful attitude toward women, claiming that they are mere victims rather than survivors who have had to make some hard choices. The argument also implies that women have no responsibility for their choices, since their choices are not made rationally.

It seems clear to me that part of the story of women's oppression has to do with ideology and false consciousness. However, if I can show that all rational agents who are in the kind of objective circumstances that women in contemporary society often find themselves would make the same decisions, then I will substantiate the claim that there is more to oppression of women than erecting an ideology and keeping women enraptured by it. I will also have made a powerful argument, without appealing to any essential nature that is peculiar to women, that there is a social injustice that needs to be remedied. And with this analysis we will ultimately be able to examine the duties of women themselves in such situations.

I begin by setting out four criteria of oppression. In order to make clear the final criterion of oppression, coercion, I shall defend a moralized theory of coercion that accounts for institutional coercion. Then I present a model to explain a typical feature of women's oppression as the result of rational choices of the women, and show that it is oppressive by my criteria. My aim in this paper is to show that coercion can be the result of a special kind of constrained rational choice, that a common feature of oppression is that the oppressed make such rational but coerced choice, and that women in particular are oppressed by such coercive choices.

II. Criteria of oppression

"Oppression" picks out a special kind of harm done to groups of persons by other groups of persons.⁵ To say that a group is oppressed entails that its members face decreased options and diminished

⁵. I will be setting out a conception of oppression here that is influenced by Marilyn Frye, The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory, (Trumansburg, N.Y.: The Crossing Press, 1983), Marilyn Friedman

futures vis-a-vis other members of the society. "Oppression" is a morally charged and rhetorically loaded term; it is a serious charge that is sometimes too lightly made, and other times self-deceptively avoided. To say that someone is oppressed or that a situation is oppressive for someone implies that there is a serious social disorder. The word carries with it a deep moral claim against those responsible for the oppression, or those who are responsible for maintaining the oppressive status quo. Oppression is *prima facie* injustice, and to oppress someone is morally wrong. There are, of course, some injustices which cannot be rectified or compensated without creating greater injustice. I ignore these balancing problems for now. To see when it is an appropriate charge, I begin by positing four necessary and jointly sufficient criteria of oppression. These criteria are adequate only if they select that set of cases which we can reasonably agree are cases of oppression. But they are only useful if there is something informative about them. The best test for them would be to see if they correctly classify cases that one feels are clearly cases or are clearly not cases of oppression, and so to see if these criteria constitute a reflective equilibrium. In this paper I shall consider only enough cases to make each criterion plausible.

First, oppression must involve some sort of physical or psychological harm,⁶ though it need not be recognized as harm by the ones who are oppressed. People can be harmed by things of which they

and Larry May, "Harming Women as a Group," Social Theory and Practice, 11, no.2, (Summer 1985) , and discussions with Tamara Horowitz. There are important ways in which it would be at odds with a view like that of Iris Young, who argues that oppression cannot be understood in the liberal language of distributive justice.

⁶. Iris Young, in Justice and the Politics of Difference (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), gives an account of oppression by focussing on the kinds of harm that are involved in oppression. These harms supply a set of individually sufficient criteria for a situation to be oppressive. Her analysis of the kinds of harm caused by oppression seems right to me. However, I argue that any harm by itself cannot be definitive of oppression. Consider for example a young white, upper middle class, male college basketball player who is exploited by the NCAA rules governing eligibility for athletes, and by the university who reaps the benefits of his exploitation. On Young's account he would be oppressed because exploi-

are not aware: one can get cancer from some odorless, colorless, tasteless chemicals, or one can be prevented from getting an education by a system whose unfairness one does not recognize. One kind of harm that is typical of oppression, and important for the oppression that I will focus on, is limited freedom of choice relative to others in one's society. Not all harm is oppression, and not all limitations on one's freedom of choice oppress, though. People who are killed in airplane accidents or people who make poor investment decisions and lose their shirts are not, in suffering those harms, oppressed.

The second feature of oppression is that it applies in the first instance to groups who are identifiable independently of their oppressed status. Oppression is a kind of harm that individual members of groups suffer by virtue of their membership in that group.⁷ To say that a person is oppressed means that she belongs to a group that is oppressed and that she suffers some oppressive harms. Oppression is a special kind of harm, a harm that comes to persons because they belong to a group that they closely identify with, so that the harm attaches to their very self-image.⁸ If "oppression" is to pick out something interesting about our social structure, then it has to refer to harm done to structural groups in the society,

tation is a sufficient criterion, what she calls one of the "faces", of oppression. But it seems implausible to count someone as oppressed who is not allowed to reap the incredibly unequal social benefits of his physical abilities. Presumably Nozick would disagree, but surely Young herself would not.

⁷. This requirement would need to be rephrased for the case of the working class, since it gets the causal arrow wrong to say that they are oppressed because they are working class. Rather the working class is that class because of the way that they are oppressed. I am grateful to Tamara Horowitz for pointing this out.

⁸. The group harm aspect of my account of oppression owes much to Friedman and May, op.cit.

and not just arbitrary sets of persons. One kind of harm that inevitably accompanies oppression as a result of its group-specific nature is *degradation*.⁹

Third, oppression implies that some persons benefit, (or think they do), from the oppression. A stronger criterion than this is sometimes required: that there be an identifiable oppressor class. For a group to be an oppressor group its members must intentionally oppress another group. But having the intention to oppress requires that one understand the relevant ramifications of one's actions, and in many cases of oppression such detailed knowledge of the social fabric is not widely available. Many typical cases of oppression involve persons who reinforce the status quo social norms without thereby intending to harm anyone else, or even without being aware that upholding the status quo could harm others. These persons lack the moral knowledge to be held morally responsible for their actions. Since the term "oppressor" implies moral responsibility, it is best reserved for those who know the results of their action.¹⁰ This is not to deny that persons cannot be culpably ignorant and for this reason be an oppressor despite their ignorance. I claim only that there are also cases of oppression which are sufficiently hidden to the average, normally conscientious, moral agent so that we could not reasonably require her to be aware of the oppression.¹¹ In such cases she is not an oppressor, even though she participates in op-

⁹. For an illuminating account of degradation see Judith Hill, "Pornography and Degradation", *Hypatia*, 2, no.2 (Summer 1987). Also, Jeffrie Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁰. Perhaps knowledge is too great a requirement here, and something more like having good reason to believe is better. I will take the stronger requirement in this paper, since the purpose here is to examine oppression rather than the moral responsibilities for rectifying it. See Raymond S. Pfeiffer, "The Responsibility of Men for the Oppression of Women", *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 2, no.2, (1985). for a classification of the degrees of moral responsibility agents can have for oppression.

¹¹. Calhoun Cheshire, "Responsibility and Reproach", *Ethics*, 99, (1989) discusses the relationship between ignorance and responsibility for oppression. She points out that feminism gives one a special in-

pressive practices, that is, social practices that tend to maintain oppression of some group. Could it be the case that no one benefits from oppression? Since oppression is a phenomenon that happens to a group that is a proper subset of the population, those who are not oppressed gain (at least) to whatever extent social rewards are zero sum. There are zero sum aspects to many social interactions: excluding Blacks from some jobs makes more job opportunities for whites, the lower wages that women earn redistributes the social product toward men. Thus where there is oppression there is a group who suffers and a group who benefits. The persons who are most likely to be the ones enforcing the coercion that brings about the oppression are those who benefit most from it, but this is not always the case. Overseers of slaves are sometimes slaves themselves.

Fourth, oppression must involve some coercion or force. As Levin argues, if oppression is entirely voluntarily chosen by the oppressed, then how can the oppressed complain about it? In order for the oppressed to be able to complain that they are wronged, it must be that they are coerced into the situation in which they suffer the oppressive harm. Thus, my view is that while in some circumstances choice negates the claim of oppression, the claim of coercion negates the voluntariness of the choice, and re-establishes the claim of oppression. Coercion, as I shall argue, can be subtle and unrecognized by the one who suffers it, although it is typically recognized by its victims. One suspects coercion whenever a bad outcome is inescapable for its victims, but much more will have to be said about coercion, as I shall in the following section.

This paper is meant to be complementary to other analyses of oppression; it aims to highlight the fact that barriers can arise for all as a result of the choices of some, that the choices can be motivated by a vicious cycle in the individual's case. I examine one specific feature of oppression -- the apparently freely chosen collaboration in their oppression -- which is especially acute in the case of women, although

sight to oppression that non-feminists are ignorant of, yet because (so far) feminism has not gained widespread acceptance non-feminists are not culpably ignorant. This has important implications, as she argues, for assigning moral blame for oppression.

present in other examples of oppression as well.¹² My purpose is not to argue that this feature of oppression, which I call *oppression by choice*, is the most important feature, or that it is a necessary condition of oppression, or that it is the most harmful aspect of oppression. But it is critical to examine oppression by choice in order to counter the argument implied by the quotes from Levin and Fuchs, and to do so without chalking it all up to the false consciousness of the victims.

III. Coercion and voluntary choice

A necessary condition of coercion is that one lacks a choice, but one has to lack choice in the right way to be coerced. Choices may be voluntary or involuntary, freely made or forced. To be coerced to act is still to act, that is, to exercise some choice. Even when you get mugged (a paradigm case of coercion, I suppose) you have a choice in the sense of two options: give the mugger your money or refuse and risk losing your life. But a coerced choice is different from a voluntary choice psychologically and morally. Psychologically, coerced persons feel that they are compelled to act as they do by the unacceptability of their other options; one says in such circumstances that one had "no choice" but to act as one did. Morally, coercion is a *prima facie* wrong because it violates justice and the autonomy of its victim.¹³ Also, the voluntariness of a choice determines, to the degree that it is voluntary, whether one can be held responsible for one's action or whether one can receive moral credit for it. When someone is

¹². There are many other groups one could have chosen to oppose in this way, perhaps even better ones. There are also subgroups of women who are members of other oppressed or oppressor groups, and likewise there are subgroups of men who are oppressed as members of some of these groups. I mean neither to dispute these facts nor underestimate their importance. I also do not mean to claim that the sort of oppression I discuss here is the only sort women suffer; it most certainly is not.

¹³. Robert Nozick, op.cit., argues that coercion is a violation of justice; Joseph Raz, The Morality of Freedom, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) argues that coercion is a violation of autonomy. I shall argue that it can be both or either.

coerced her actions may be justified or excused. Coercion is not the absence of all choice, but a lack of the right kind of choices, namely, voluntary choices.

There are two competing philosophical accounts of coercion in the literature, which I shall describe, following Wertheimer, as an empirical account and a moralized account. An empirical account "maintains that the truth of a coercion claim rests, at its core, on ordinary facts: will B be worse off than he now is if he fails to accept A's proposal? Is there great psychic pressure on B? Does B have any 'reasonable' alternative?"¹⁴ Empirical accounts ask about the allegedly coerced agent's state of mind, about whether he feels that his choice is voluntary, or made under conditions of duress. They are parallel to psychological theories of freedom, and do not require a prior normative theory. A moralized theory "holds that we cannot determine whether A coerces B without answering the following sorts of questions: Does A have the right to make his proposal? Should B resist A's proposal? Is B entitled to recover should he succumb to A's proposal?"¹⁵ Moralized theories of coercion claim that the state of mind of the allegedly coerced person is irrelevant to the question of whether she is coerced, and that the only relevant matter is whether the agent is denied some choice that she ought morally to have. Thus moralized theories are embedded within a moral theory, typically a theory of rights or entitlement.

Many Marxist arguments for the claim that workers are coerced in capitalism employ empirical accounts of force and coercion. For example, in History, Labour and Freedom: Themes from Marx, G.A. Cohen argues that workers are forced to make contracts that exploit them, or that subject them to hazardous conditions, because they had no "acceptable alternative" to making these contracts. He argues that the proletariat is unfree because they are forced to work for capitalists who exploit them. Their only alternatives to working for the wages proposed by the capitalist are starvation, or begging, or going on the public dole, and these are not acceptable alternatives because they involve death or serious disenfranchisement from society. Hence workers are forced to make exploitative contracts. This is an empirical

¹⁴. Alan Wertheimer, Coercion, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.7.

¹⁵. Ibid., p.7.

account of force since it simply examines the alternatives open to the persons, not whether the options are deserved.

However, one might argue that a moral theory sneaks into the account in assessing the acceptability of one's alternatives. If an alternative is unacceptable because the agent *feels* that it is, then the theory is not moralized, but it threatens to leave us with the view that all hard choices are forced. If, on the other hand, an alternative counts as unacceptable because it is undeserved or unusually unfair in one's society, then the theory of force is moralized after all. Cohen explains what he means by "unacceptable" as follows. An alternative B is unacceptable compared to A if and only if B is not worse than A or B is not thoroughly bad, where "thoroughly bad" is understood in an absolute sense in expected utility terms.¹⁶ He claims that by taking "thoroughly bad" as "absolute *in some sense*" we avoid the conclusion that rational persons are always forced to do what they do, since they always do the utility maximizing thing. But Cohen's understanding of unacceptable alternatives leads to the conclusion that all hard choices are forced choices. Perhaps survival is an objective criterion of acceptability, but it is difficult to see what else is objectively unacceptable in the absence of a moral theory, and it is clear that survivability is too weak as a criterion of acceptability. Furthermore, Cohen's understanding does not allow choices to be forced when the options are not so "thoroughly bad", but when they are unfair, unequal, or undeserved. Suppose that a person has a choice between two mediocre and uninspired high schools, but is denied the option of attending a very good high school in her neighborhood because she is Black. This is a case where we would want to say that she is forced to choose the school she chooses, even though it is not "thoroughly bad", since it is morally unacceptable that she should be prevented from attending the good school on grounds of race.

Like most Marxists, Cohen argues that force, oppression, and exploitation are *objective* circumstances of workers in capitalism. That claim seems to me to be right when understood as saying that

¹⁶. G.A. Cohen, History, Labour, and Freedom: Themes from Marx, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.282. Expected utility is just the sum of the products of the utilities of the possible outcomes and their probabilities of occurring.

oppression goes deeper than mere feeling of the workers, that oppression involves their physical circumstances. This explains how workers can be oppressed even when they do not feel as though they are: they could be in objectively bad circumstances and believe that they deserve them and so deny that they are oppressed. It would be a mistake to take the claim of objectivity to imply that oppression is therefore non-normative, however. We can make sense of a moralized theory of force as objectively determinable *by an objective moral theory*, where the theory of force is moralized, and we can require that the harms suffered by the forced or coerced persons be objective harms.¹⁷ Thus we can agree that force, coercion, and oppression are objective, while maintaining that the theory of force, etc. are moralized theories.

Like Cohen, Jeffrey Reiman conceptualizes force empirically, but he applies it to situations of *structural force*, where a group of persons together make choices within constraints that only appear statistically, relative to other persons in society.¹⁸ That is, it appears only when one examines the outcomes statistically, comparing groups of persons. This sort of force is built right into the structure of society, through its laws, social practices, and norms. Structural force is difficult to see, since, as Reiman points out, there is some play in the alternatives open to the "forced" persons, some sense in which they can choose how they will comply with or fit within the constraints of the structures. Reiman argues that the working class only appears to be unforced in making employment contracts because they can choose which capitalist to contract with, but their range of options "imposes fates" on them that guarantee that there will always be workers who lack access to means of production and thus have to make less advantageous contracts with capitalists.¹⁹ This is the sense of force that we must recognize if we are to make

¹⁷. This is not to deny that some psychological states induced by coercion are objective harms, by which I mean harms that are intersubjectively verifiable.

¹⁸. Jeffrey Reiman, "Exploitation, Force, and the Moral Assessment of Capitalism: Thoughts on Roemer and Cohen", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 16, (1987).

¹⁹. *Ibid.*, pp.12-3.

any headway in understanding oppression, oppressive economic structures as well as sexism and racism, since oppression is a structural phenomenon.

In contrast to these empirical accounts, Robert Nozick argues that only a moralized account of coercion supports the moral force of a coercion claim. On his view, one cannot claim to be coerced simply because one has bad alternatives, but only if one had the *right* to better ones. "A person's choice among differing degrees of unpalatable alternatives is not rendered nonvoluntary by the fact that others voluntarily chose and acted within their rights in a way that did not provide him with a more palatable alternative."²⁰ The example he uses to argue this point is choice of marriage partners among (presumably heterosexual) men and women who have the same preference orderings over the members of the other gender as all the other members of their own. Suppose that there are 26 of each, with names A-Z for men and A'-Z' for women, and suppose that they are rank ordered by each member of the opposite gender in alphabetic order, so that A is preferred to B is preferred to C, etc. by women and A' is preferred to B' is preferred to C', etc. by men. Suppose that their preferences are transitive and that they prefer any of the other gender to remaining unmarried. Then if they are perfectly free to accept or reject any other partner, A will marry A', B will marry B', and so forth. In this situation B's options limit him to selecting from among B'-Z', C's options are limited to C'-Z', etc. Are they coerced into marrying their partners? Nozick argues that clearly they are not, but that on an empirical account of coercion they must be (provided that the agents' first choices are significantly more preferred by them to their other choices). They are not coerced, according to Nozick, since each of the women who they could not marry had the right to choose another partner to marry, and thus limit the men's choices. But to say that this is coercive is to say that these men are owed some remedy, and the only possible remedy would be to violate the women's choices and coerce them into marrying men whom they do not wish to marry. Thus the choices that these people make, even those of Z and Z', who are each getting only their 26th choice of mates, cannot be coercive.

²⁰. Nozick, op.cit., p.264.

On Nozick's view, coercion claims must be judged against a theory of rights. Cohen denies this, pointing out that Nozick's view "has the absurd upshot" that the criminal who is imprisoned justly is therefore not *forced* to be in prison.²¹ Clearly there are two senses of "force" being used here: in Cohen's use P is forced to A whenever P finds the alternatives to A unacceptable or physically impossible to resist, while in Nozick's use force arises only when P's rights are being violated by someone's denying her another alternative. The issue concerning the use of "force" would be entirely semantic but for the fact that each is trying to derive a moral conclusion from them. In Nozick's case the conclusion comes immediately: being forced to do A means that one's rights are being violated and thus one is being wronged. In Cohen's case the moral conclusion comes down the road a bit: if P is forced to A then P is unfree, but since the lacked freedom is not a moral freedom, the moral implication arises only when one shows that it is unjust for P to be unfree, and that has to do with the fairness of P's situation as compared to that of her fellows. In deciding on the fairness of P's situation, Cohen may not appeal to the fact that P is forced, for no moral conclusion can follow from it, as the marriage case or even the prison case clearly show. "Force" has no normative force unless it appeals to a background moral theory when determining what counts as an acceptable alternative, either a theory of freedom that tells us when it is obstructed immorally, or a theory of justice. Thus Cohen's account of force is either normatively impotent or it appeals to a background moral theory after all.

David Zimmerman objects to moralized accounts of coercion because they do not appeal to freedom in explaining why coercion is *prima facie* wrong. On his view, coercion is wrong "because it involves frustration of the victim's desire to remain in the pre-threat situation or involves a use of his preference structure as a mere means."²² Coercion is wrong because it violates freedom, not justice as Nozick would have it. And if a threat frustrates one's desires or manipulates one into choosing what one does not want by offering only poor alternatives, then it violates one's freedom. But as was the case with

²¹. G.A. Cohen op.cit., p.256.

²². David Zimmerman, "Coercive Wage Offers", Philosophy and Public Affairs, 10, no.2, (1981), p.130.

Cohen's non-moral account of force, a lack of this sense of freedom is not itself *prima facie* wrong. It is, to be sure, against the interests of the agent. But to argue that it is a wrong we must make the case that the freedom denied is essential to the dignity or autonomy of the agent, or that the agent had a right to that freedom. That is, we need to ask prior moral questions. So if coercion is to be even *prima facie* wrong, there is no avoiding the background moral theory. Yet Zimmerman uncovers an important aspect of coercion that Nozick overlooks: to be denied autonomy in a sense that is essential to one's moral agency may count as a way of violating a person's moral rights, but to speak in terms of rights is sometimes to neglect an agent's moral claim to that autonomy. Coercion, then, should be judged against a background moral theory that takes autonomy, as well as property rights, seriously.

For my purposes, I must (though I am not forced to) agree with Nozick that coercion claims are to be judged against a background moral theory.²³ On my account of it, oppression claims themselves are *prima facie* moral claims for remedy or redress. The point of the coercion requirement in my account of oppression is to transmit the *prima facie* moral claim, and Nozick shows convincingly that only a moralized account can do this. To accept a moralized account of coercion, however, is not necessarily to accept Nozick's account. First, one may reject Nozick's theory of rights as historically grounded. Moreover, one may argue, as I shall, that coercion claims must be judged against a broader moral theory than the theory of property rights. As in Nozick's account of voluntary choice, I take coercion to be a non-voluntary choice where the voluntariness of the choice is moralized, and where a choice that is involuntary but which could not be altered by human action is also not coerced. But where Nozick discusses only violations of rights as the requirement of involuntariness, I argue that the moral background should be broadened to a theory of justice. Here's why. Rights are formulated within social institutions

²³. Jon Elster, Making Sense of Marx, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) implies that there are some purposes for which a moralized theory of coercion or force is necessary, and others for which an empirical theory is adequate. See pp.212-3. I am claiming that a theory of structural oppression requires a moralized account of coercion, but I would agree with Elster's pluralist position that an empirical theory may be better for other purposes.

and norms that are taken for granted. Rex Martin writes that rights "are institutional practices which require an institutional setting".²⁴ Within a set of social practices, which normally appear to be determined prior to moral or legal systems, rights may be justified as fair and just rules for interactions among individuals. The emphasis on rights tends to obscure the contingent nature of the social practices and the way that background social institutions and practices rig the competition for the gains from social cooperation in favor of some and against others. While seeing that rights must be morally justified for a system, political philosophers tend to take their own social practices, or the ancestors of those practices, for granted.²⁵ For example, consider a Nozickean world where two persons have the same rights but where the parents of one are wealthy and generous to their child and the parents of the other are poor. Clearly they have differential access to the gains from social cooperation. On Nozick's theory there can be no more moral consideration of the situation than whether the line of succession of the property rights is unbroken by force or fraud. But it is arbitrary to restrict moral consideration to property rights as they have been protected and enforced by the state powers in that historical chain. These powers have also denied women and serfs and slaves the rights even to seek to own property, for instance, and every person now living has some of these disenfranchised persons in their past. Even if the men who have owned property had the right to acquire the property and treated no one else unjustly in acquiring it, there were many others who were prevented from competing with them for a claim to it. Since owning property enables one more easily to acquire more property, those who were denied the right to own property were not competing on an equal or fair basis even once they were given those rights. Thus there have been violations of justice, if not of property rights *per se*, in the transmission of every claim to property ownership.

²⁴. Rex Martin, A System of Rights, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.2.

²⁵. Martin, op.cit., argues that not only legal rights are recognized only within the constraints set by background practices, but this is also true for theories of moral or human rights. He writes: "social recognition, an actual and appropriate awareness on the part of people in society, is a necessary condition of a morally valid claim's being (or becoming) a moral right." p.82.

The point I am making is more general than this, however. I am claiming that since social institutions define the available options in favor of some groups and to the disadvantage of others, and since this advantage and disadvantage is sometimes unjust but not a violation of rights, we need a broader moral theory as the background moral theory in our account of coercion. Specifically, we need a moral theory that can recognize injustice in social institutions. To illustrate the problem, let us reconsider Nozick's marriage example. Suppose again that the men and the women each have preference rankings of all the members of the opposite gender, and that these rankings are transitive (i.e., if A is preferred to B and B to C, then A is preferred to C) and strict (for any two choices A and B either A is preferred to B or B to A), but we need not suppose that the rankings are exactly the same for each member of the two groups. Now suppose that the men are allowed to propose to their favorite women and the women are allowed only to accept or reject the proposals and not to propose, and again suppose that everyone is free to refuse to marry anyone whom they would rather not marry. In such a situation it can be shown analytically that: (1) a stable set of marriages will form, in the sense that no one will be paired with someone who they like worse than someone else who likes her better than his partner; (2) the men (the proposers) are systematically advantaged over the women (the group who can only accept or reject), in the sense that all the men are happier or at least as happy with this match as the one that would have arisen from the match made by women acting as proposers and men as the group who could only accept or reject, and all the women like their match less than the alternative match in which they get to propose.²⁶ That is, the men are benefitted as a group by this matchmaking arrangement and have a common inter-

²⁶. Alvin E. Roth and Marilda A. Oliveira Sotomayor, Two-Sided Matching: A Study in Game-theoretic Modeling and Analysis, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), ch. 2. The algorithm for producing provably stable matches is quite precisely and formally described there, and differs slightly from the description in my text above, in that the side that accepts or rejects is allowed to keep a proposer engaged while previously rejected proposers make new proposals. The exact details of the algorithm do not matter for my point, though, which is that the structure of the normative practice of marriage proposals can systematically disadvantage a group.

est in maintaining it, even while they compete with each other within it and it gives both men and women *equal rights* to reject any proposed partner. This marriage market shows that the norms that govern proposals in marriage can seriously disadvantage one group, even while they are voluntary and equal under the law. The case of marriage is especially important to the overall theme of this paper, since it is a case where apparently arbitrary and innocent gender distinctions solidify into one gender's disadvantage. Exactly how unjust this disadvantage is depends on whether there is systematic disadvantage for that gender in many institutions, and whether the disadvantage is avoidable. In the marriage market the disadvantage is readily avoided by allowing each individual to play either role. So this example provides an illustration of the claim that one's choices can be unfairly limited without a violation of one's rights.

Nozick's model of force is an agent-to-agent model; the marriage market example shows that force can also be applied by institutions on agents, and thus that Nozick's model is too limited.²⁷ Social practices, institutions, and norms give persons power (or differential access to burdens and benefits) in relationships, and sometimes they do so by differentiating between persons on account of gender or race. In the marriage market example the power to propose enforced the best possible outcome for men within the confines of a stable matchmaking institution that allowed women the right to reject any suitor. Social institutions thus create unequal power in relationships among individuals of different groups. The agent-to-agent model conceals the force relationships between persons with unequal power. What we need, then, is a moralized theory of coercion that reveals these relationships and determines when they are unjust. Thus we need a model of institutional coercion that takes a theory of fairness and justice as its background moral theory. The definition of institutional coercion that I propose is the following:

An institution (norm, legal system) is coercive if the institution unfairly limits the choices of some group of persons relative to other groups in society.

There are two issues that arise immediately with this definition: (1) what theory of fairness or justice should we apply? (2) what counts as a group? I dealt earlier in this paper with the definition of social

²⁷. Barbara Herman recognizes this distinction between agent-agent coercion and institutional coercion in "Agency, Attachment, and Difference", *Ethics*, 101, no.4, (July 1991), p.796.

group, and I believe that the definition provided there answers this question adequately for my purposes here. As for (1), this paper is hardly the place to develop a theory of justice, however I owe the reader some brief elaboration of my view. To determine whether a social institution, and the burdens and benefits it differentially distributes, is fair, I take it that we need to ask whether persons would agree to this institution behind a veil of ignorance and choose to maintain it once the veil is lifted. But this standard is admittedly both vague and complex. What count as arbitrary features of persons that they should not know about themselves? How can a single social institution be judged in isolation from others, and if it cannot be judged in isolation, then how do we know that only one combination of social institutions would be deemed rational, and if more than one, then what do we say about one set that benefits one group, and another set that benefits another group? I do not hope adequately to answer these questions here. Despite the difficulty of these questions, however, I think we can make some broad and preliminary judgments about the character of fair social institutions. Most importantly, there would surely be no social institutions that would benefit men at the expense of women, white persons at the expense of persons of color, straight persons at the expense of gay or lesbian ones, or make any of the other humiliating discriminations against groups that I discussed in the previous section. There are two justifications for this claim that I shall state but not elaborate here. First, such discriminations lead to instability in resulting institutions because they violate dignity, which is held dear by all persons. By signifying that they are morally inferior for features of themselves over which they have no control, discriminating against persons in this way will cause them to resist those institutions that maintain the discrimination. Since a just society is a stable one, such institutions cannot exist in a just society. Second, they violate the autonomy of persons by restricting their choices for reasons that would not be agreed upon by equals. To be agreed upon by free and equal persons, a social institution cannot violate autonomy.

I conclude this section by summarizing what I have argued about coercion. The account of coercion that will support the claim that oppression is *prima facie* unjust is a moralized account of coercion, including institutional coercion. Such an account of coercion allows us to claim that coercion negates the aspect of choice that makes plausible Levin's view that choice negates oppression; choice negates oppression, then, only when the choice is uncoerced. The background moral theory, in order to account for

institutional coercion, must go beyond a theory of property rights, even beyond a theory of moral or human rights, and must be a complete theory of justice of social institutions. Furthermore, that theory of justice will take violations of autonomy of persons to be *prima facie* unjust. Armed with this fuller account of coercion, let us return to the claim that women are oppressed by the apparently voluntary choices they make.

IV. Vicious cycles

There is a loaded query aimed at feminists that goes something like this: didn't she choose to stay home with the kids? The quotes by Levin and Fuchs illustrate the point of the question: if she chose her situation how can anyone call it oppression? The question is rhetorical; it is supposed to absolve society of any guilt for putting her, or women generally, into a disadvantageous position vis-a-vis men. The question presupposes an analysis of oppression that says that a society in which persons may choose their occupations is free (at least in this sphere), and if the society is free then there is no oppression (in that sphere), no matter what results from their choices. If someone freely chooses her situation, she is responsible for its consequences, and if she was rational when making her choice, then she must really want, all things considered, whatever she could foresee as its consequences. That is, choice confers responsibility.

Contemporary western society is commonly thought to be free in this sense (among others). There is anecdotal evidence for this belief: the ranks of the owners of business and leaders of government and education include people who raised themselves from the bottom of the socio-economic ladder to near the top, and their stories, appealing as they are, become well known.²⁸ Since there are those who do succeed in climbing the ladder in their chosen field, many infer that it is possible for all to do so. And they further infer that this implies free choice of occupation, subject only to the constraints of native talent. There is also an *a priori* argument that economists give for the claim that there is no dis-

²⁸. Think only of the almost legendary status of business leaders like Lee Iacocca, politicians like Jesse Jackson or Barbara Mikulski, and educators like Thomas Sowell.

crimination on the part of business against any particular racial group or gender. Since businesses are out to maximize profits, and indeed (so the argument goes) cannot survive if they don't, they must seek to hire the most talented individuals regardless of race or gender. Thus they do not discriminate on the basis of race or gender, since those who would discriminate would tend to go out of business.²⁹

At the same time, women who are employed in the outside labor force in the U.S. continue to earn about 64% of what men earn. This proportion is roughly equal at all levels of education, that is, women with less than high school education earn approximately 64% of what men with less than high school education earn, and women with more than 4 years of college earn approximately 64% of what men with more than 4 years of college earn.³⁰ How can we explain this wage gap? Two general kinds of explanations compete: (1) there is outright discrimination against women; (2) women make employment choices that somehow give rise to the gap. Although (1) -- the discrimination explanation -- can be shown to have considerable support,³¹ there are two reasons why it is unlikely that it completely explains the wage gap. First, even if the *a priori* argument that employers do not discriminate is refuted as a complete analysis by the evidence, it is often in the pecuniary interest of individual employers who can do so to overcome their prejudices against the most well-qualified women they have a chance to hire. Since

²⁹. See Barbara R. Bergmann, The Economic Emergence of Women, (New York: Basic Books, 1986), pp.9-10, 63-64 for critical explication of this argument, and for an example of an economics text that argues this, see Belton M. Fleisher and Thomas J. Knieser, Labor Economics: Theory, Evidence, and Policy, third ed., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1985, pp.405-13.

³⁰. Statistics from Bergmann, op.cit., taken from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Money, Income of Households, Families, and Persons in the United States: 1984, Series P-60, no.151. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1986. Within some specific categories the gap is smaller, for example female MBAs earn approximately 12% less than male MBAs. But a significant gap remains even there.

³¹. Ibid.

such women face a lower demand for their services if there is any invidious discrimination, they will be cheaper to hire than equally qualified men. For most employers the disadvantages of hiring women because of the employers' prejudices will be outweighed by the advantages of better labor for lower cost. Thus self-interest would tend to mitigate the effects of invidious discrimination. Second, since employers in the U.S. are also at least as prejudiced against Blacks in this society, one would expect that the Black-white wage gap would be as severe as the female-male wage gap. But the Black-white wage gap (comparing only men) is less than half (15%) of the female-male wage gap (40%) (comparing only whites).³² (I don't mean to imply that Black men are less oppressed than white women, but these statistics suggest that the discrimination against each group leads to different kinds of bad consequences for them.) In the U.S., the law states that employers must pay equally for equal work. But while this law seems to have decreased the wage effects of racial discrimination, the wage gap among men and women remains almost the same as it was before the law. This lends evidence to both explanations, so that it is not necessary to choose between them.³³ Thus, at least some of the wage gap results from different occupational choices of women and men.

The wage gap sets women up for a vicious cycle that is an important feature of women's oppression. What makes it particularly insidious is that the cycle is the result of apparently *rational* choices of individual women themselves. In her book Justice, Gender, and the Family, Susan Moller Okin explains how women are caught in "*a cycle of socially caused and distinctly asymmetric vulnerability*."³⁴ Okin argues that society is unjust because it creates this asymmetric vulnerability. She too makes the point that rational individual choice can play a role in this cycle. Yet she argues that "since the maldistribution of

³². Fuchs, op.cit., pp.31-2, from Census of Population and Housing, 1980: Public-Use Microdata 1/100 C-Sample, Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C., 1983.

³³. See Susan Moller Okin, Justice, Gender, and the Family, (New York: Basic Books, 1989), p.147, who makes a similar point.

³⁴. Ibid., p.138.

wages and jobs between the sexes in our society is largely out of women's control, even *seemingly non-conflictual* decisions made on this basis cannot really be considered fully voluntary on the part of wives."³⁵

What I mean to do here is to explain how the choices can be rational, nonconflictual, and coerced. First I need a model of how such decisions are made, and for this I shall borrow heavily from Okin's own illustrations. The explanation I shall give of why the wage gap persists is an example of an *invisible foot explanation*: the individually rational choices, taken by large numbers of individuals, lead to socially suboptimal outcomes. To show this I build a simple rational choice model of a man and a woman of the same age (say around 25) with exactly equal talents, education, and work experience (i.e. equal marginal productivity of labor). Let us suppose that these two, call them Larry and Lisa, have decided to marry and to have children together. In the beginning they have equal power in the relationship to enforce their individual intentions for collective action. Suppose that they harbor no prejudices about "men's" or "women's" work, and that with exception of the specific tasks of impregnation, conception, childbearing, and lactation, they are equally capable, and believe themselves to be equally capable, of all childrearing and domestic tasks. Suppose that they also believe that one parent ought to take primary care of the children, in other words, that neither socialized childcare nor equally shared care by both parents is as good as care by one parent who specializes in the children's care. Then if there is a wage gap between men and women, and Larry and Lisa have rational expectations about their relative earning potential, and if they consider only family income in making their decision, it is clear that they will decide that Lisa should specialize in childcare and Larry in wage work.

This decision has enormous implications for their future and the relative share of power in the family. In staying home, it will be rational for Lisa to take on the burden of the greater share of other domestic work as well, and will come to have greater skill for it. Her skills for outside employment will become less valuable, and especially relative to Larry she will become even less valuable as a wage worker for the family. Lisa will become the domestic specialist and Larry the specialist in wage work. Even later, when the children are grown to the point where both parents feel they can work outside the

³⁵. *Ibid.*, p.154.

home, her value as a domestic worker will be on the whole greater than Larry's, and his greater value as a wage worker will guarantee that he need never take on a large share of domestic tasks.

This division of labor could be neutral with respect to power in some societies, but not in societies such as our own in which wealth determines power, domestic work is unpaid, and divorce laws do not evenly divide wealth. In a relationship the relative power of the partners is determined largely by the opportunities available to each should the relationship end.³⁶ While Lisa's value as a domestic worker does not increase much since it is unpaid work, Larry's value increases with experience. He builds what economists call "human capital". If their relationship ends then Larry has the human capital to guarantee that his income will continue the same, while Lisa, whose skills and value as a wage worker have atrophied since she took on the domestic work, will see her income fall appreciably. Even if divorce laws evenly divide the accumulated wealth between them, the difference in their future incomes as a result of their uneven human capital will be greater the longer the marriage (and hence her domestic specialization) has lasted. Furthermore, Lisa still faces the wage gap, which was the reason that she specialized in domestic work to begin with. Thus Lisa's prospects are considerably dimmer than Larry's if the relationship ends. And this means that she has less power in the ongoing relationship.

Her lack of power might be manifested in many ways in the marriage. He can demand that she work more hours than he does, that she continue to serve him after each has put in a day of work. He may demand that if she gets a job outside the home that she sacrifice her job to meet family needs and

³⁶. In Albert O. Hirschman's Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), he argues that the feasibility of exit from a relationship determines one's power within a relationship. See also Okin, op.cit., ch.7. Formal bargaining theory supports the claim that the opportunities should the relationship fail determine the share of goods in the relationship, since the no-agreement outcome plays a crucial role in determining the outcome of the bargain. John Stuart Mill in On the Subjection of Women, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), also recognized that differences in bargaining power within a marriage would determine what women would choose to do. (See esp. p.43.)

emergencies, that she take time from work to care for sick children or household repairs. He may demand more leisure time, or refuse to share his wages with her. He may beat or rape her with much less risk of punishment than if they held power equally, since she will turn him in only when the loss of utility from her lower income (and whatever else she thinks she loses) without him is outweighed by the loss of utility of being beaten or raped.³⁷

If Larry and Lisa represent typical men and women in society, then there are serious consequences for all men and women arising from the typical individually rational choices about work and family. If it is the case that women typically make the decision to subordinate career and work to family and domestic tasks, then women will be seen as the domestic workers of the society and as unreliable wage workers. There is evidence, statistical and anecdotal, showing that this is indeed a significant obstacle to equality of opportunity for women in the workforce.³⁸ Employers tend not to trust that women will stay with their careers, or that if they do, they will devote the kind of time and energy to them that men will.³⁹ Women are poorer risks, and so employers will not invest in specialized training for them as easily as for men, and women will not be promoted as quickly as men. The supposed unreliability of women, on average, counteracts the *a priori* argument that purports to show that employers ought not to discriminate against women. If women are less reliable workers, then it makes sense for employers to do whatever

³⁷. Recall here that the model is a rational choice model of behavior. There are surely many non-rational processes that come into play in making a decision to leave a batterer, and there may also be threats that the batterer uses to assert his power that I have not factored in. This was not meant as a complete explanation of why men batter or why women stay with batterers.

³⁸. See Fuchs, op.cit.

³⁹. In their now well known sex discrimination lawsuit, Sears tried to defend its actions on exactly these grounds -- that women are poor risks for stability, and that they (the women) did not really want jobs that would force them to make inflexible time commitments. See Jon Weiner, "Women's History on Trial", The Nation, Sept. 7, 1985.

they can to skirt the laws that demand equal treatment for men and women, for statistically speaking women are poor risks for jobs that require mobility, independence, and devotion. But these are, typically, the more highly paid (not to mention more interesting) positions. This means that women will on average earn less for the same skill level as men. But it was this fact, the wage gap, that forced women (and men) to make the choices that led to this outcome. Thus the cycle is complete. It is a vicious cycle because the opportunities for women are lowered, or at best remain stagnant, as a result of each revolution.

If the outcome for Lisa looks so bleak, then why does she agree to the original division of labor? Is it really a rational choice for women themselves? Rational choice theory, combining cooperative and non-cooperative game theory, suggests that it is rational under in the right conditions. Begin with the assumption that Larry and Lisa can unproblematically come to a joint decision. The choices that they face are for each to work for wages or to do domestic work. They cannot both choose domestic work in their society and still make a living. If they choose to both do wage work, then because of the wage gap Lisa will still have less power in the relationship, since her income is lower, and their children are less well cared for (in their view, by hypothesis). If they choose to have Larry do domestic work and Lisa do wage work, then their children are properly cared for but they have a lower income than before. The share of power is indeterminate in this case; it depends on how much she gains in human capital and how much he loses by not working, and whether the wage gap is offset by her gain and his loss. Under some conditions it will be optimal for Larry and Lisa to divide the domestic and wage work as I hypothesized;⁴⁰ the frequency of this division in our society suggests that the conditions necessary are normal conditions.⁴¹

⁴⁰. In a related article I show this with an explicit rational choice model of the Larry-Lisa situation. See Ann E. Cudd, "Hi Honey, I'm Home': Marital Work Decisions and Oppression", manuscript. Note that since the most dire of the abuses of Larry's power are uncertain results of marriage, they have to be discounted by the probability with which they are likely to occur.

⁴¹. Felice Schwartz, a professor at Harvard Business School, made quite a splash with an article in 1988 which recommended that business provide for women a "mommy track" that would allow women to subordinate career to family, but still make some career possible. The popularity of her suggestion in the

Now relax the assumption that they can unproblematically come to a joint decision over division of labor, and let them bargain over it. Larry is bound to get what he wants in the negotiation, since his no-agreement outcome is better than hers.⁴² Even if they break up he will gain more by virtue of the wage gap. She will resist his demands only if her break up outcome is better than his demand, that is, if she expects that her life with him as the domestic worker will be worse than her life without him and working for wages or as a domestic worker married to someone else.

The fact that individual women's choices makes the situation worse for all women does not play a role in the rationally self-interested calculation in a sufficiently large society. If there are many women facing the same kinds of options, then what any one woman chooses does not affect the overall position of women. One marginal woman cannot change the stereotype of women for better or worse. This situation is analogous to a market where there are many buyers: one buyer influences the market price by a very small amount, and so acts as a price taker. Similarly, Lisa must take the stereotypes of men and women and the resulting wage gap as, for all practical purposes, given. Where the result in the market is an invisible hand that allocates goods efficiently, the result of individual rational choice in a vicious cycle is an invisible foot that grinds down the social position of women.

The Larry and Lisa model shows how a vicious cycle can result from simply an initial social inequality and subsequent rational, apparently voluntary, choices. Even the maintenance of the social ine-

media suggests that this is indeed the stereotypical image of women workers, even executives: less committed to their work than men are, and more willing to sacrifice their careers to temporary family emergencies and needs. See Felice Schwartz, "Management Women and the New Facts of Life", Harvard Business Review, (January-February, 1988). For an account of the reaction in the popular press, see Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English, "Blowing the Whistle on the 'Mommy Track'", Ms., (July/August, 1989).

⁴². See Cudd op.cit..

quality is the rational result of the choices made by individuals, given an initial social inequality.⁴³ This in itself tells us little more than Levin and Fuchs could tell us. Levin goes on to draw the moral conclusion from this freedom of choice that society is absolved from its responsibility for changing the situation, even if it appears unjust when viewed ahistorically. But does this freedom of choice so absolve society? Is a society in which vicious cycles exist just?

V. Oppression, coercion, and choice

To answer these questions we have to examine whether vicious cycles are oppressive and therefore unjust. We can apply the criteria of oppression from section II to see that vicious cycles can be manifestations of oppression, and that the vicious cycle in the Larry and Lisa example is an example of an oppressive vicious cycle. A cycle is vicious only if it is harmful. In the Larry and Lisa example I argued that women's employment opportunities are continually degraded both for the individuals and for women as a group, and this is clearly a harm. My example is one in which only women suffer from the cycle, but one might argue that one can escape the cycle if one does not share Larry and Lisa's beliefs about child care. So they should be held responsible for their beliefs and their consequences; we should not indict the social institutions for allowing oppression to arise from such pathological beliefs. Yet the fact that Larry can have those beliefs and still not get mired in the cycle indicates that the cycle picks women out specifically for worse treatment. Furthermore, the current structure of work and the lack of adequate day care for many parents makes stay-at-home parenthood a necessity for many families.⁴⁴ And it is, after all, possibly true that children ought to be cared for primarily by one parent. Some people,

⁴³. It may be arguable that an initial natural inequality could be the catalyst for the vicious cycle, though not in any conceivable social arrangement of power. In this case capitalism and the importance of access to wealth in order to have power forms the background that is necessary for the wage gap to play the catalytic role in the cycle.

⁴⁴. I owe this point to Dion Scott-Kokuros.

namely the Larrys of the world, benefit from the vicious cycle that the Lisas face. This is true even for those Larrys who regret the cycle, since their wages are relatively better than the wages of the Lisas. Thus the cycle is harmful for one social group and benefits another social group. So criteria 1-3 are satisfied.

We come then to the coercion criterion. The vicious cycle phenomenon we examined has the character of coercion because it leads to fewer and worse life choices for women than they would have were it not for the vicious cycle, both on the individual level and at the level of the wage gap for all women. This lack of choice has no redeeming aspect that leads to greater freedom either. One just cannot argue that women have more freedom as a result of the wage gap, or their lack of social power, or the ever deepening hole that women retrench for each other by choosing traditional domestic roles. The option for Lisa in the model is to eschew traditional domestic roles, either by not marrying, not having children, not raising children as they would have them raised, or to get Larry to do the domestic work. Each of these thwarts Lisa's desires except the last one. That option, though, requires agreement by Larry and results in lower living standards for the family as a whole, because of the original wage gap. Relative to the choices men face, relative to what the situation would be if there were no original wage gap, these are bad options. More importantly, they are unfair. Women's freedom of choice here is like that of the marriage market at the end of section III: women's freedom is complete only within an unjust framework for their options. Any acceptable background moral theory would regard this fundamental asymmetry in the available life choices and power as unfair. Thus women are coerced in making the choice to eschew economic power and status for domestic servitude. So I conclude that the vicious cycle is coercive. This implies that women are oppressed by the vicious cycle phenomenon, and thus, by means of their own individually rational choices. Because their individually rational choices reinforce the oppression institutions and so harm other women, one might question the morality of those choices. I shall take that question up on another occasion.⁴⁵

⁴⁵. I wish to thank Neal Becker, Debra DeBruin, Marcia Homiak, Tamara Horowitz, and Paul Hurley for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. A version of this paper was presented at the Society for

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